

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 00359 01 OF 02 180922Z
ACTION NEA-07

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 0359

STADIS

FOR NEA/ARN DRAPER FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV EAID SY US
SUBJECT: CODEL VISITS TO SYRIA

REF: STATE 10994

1. WE SHARE YOUR CONCERN ABOUT SENTIMENTS ON THE HILL TO PENALIZE SYRIA BY CUTTING AID. ON BALANCE, I THINK WE WILL BE FORTUNATE IF THE RECENT VISITS BY CODELS ZABLOCKI AND WILLIAMS/STEVENS DO NOT FURTHER STIMULATE SUCH SENTIMENTS. PUBLIC RELATIONS IS NOT A SYRIAN SKILL. THE IRONY IS THAT KHADDAM SEES IT AS HIS PERSONAL MISSION TO RECEIVE CODELS AND GOES OUT OF HIS WAY TO ALLOW THEM AMPLE TIME, OFTEN MORE THAN DESIRABLE, FOR A "FULL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS." HE IS CONVINCED, AS HE SAID TO ZABLOCKI, THAT ONE DIFFICULTY IN ARAB-AMERICAN UNDERSTANDING IS THAT ARAB SPOKESMEN TEND TO SUGARCOAT THEIR PRESENTATIONS TO VISITING AMERICANS AND THIS ONLY CONTRIBUTES TO FURTHER MISUNDERSTANDINGS. WHEN HE TRIES HIS BEST TO BE FRANK, HE UNFORTUNATELY INDEED COMES ACROSS AS "INTEMPERATE AND ACID."

2. ONE GENERAL OBSERVATION YOU MAY MAKE TO MEMBERS AND STAFFERS ON THESE LAST TWO DELEGATIONS IS THAT THEIR
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VISITS CAME AT AN AWKWARD TIME FOR THE SYRIAN LEADERSHIP WHICH A) WAS DEEPLY DISTURBED BY THE SADAT INITIATIVES, B) HAD NOT YET FORMULATED ITS OWN POLICY -- OR AT LEAST WAS UNWILLING TO COMMUNICATE IT IF IT HAD DONE SO, AND C) ASSAD HIMSELF, WHO NORMALLY SENDS HIS VISITORS AWAY HAPPY, WAS UNAVAILABLE TO SEE THE SECOND CODEL BECAUSE OF BOUMEDIENNE'S CONCURRENT VISIT.

ACTUALLY, ONE OF THE SENATORS IN THAT CODEL COMMENTED, BEFORE WE KNEW THAT THEY WOULD BE UNABLE TO SEE THE PRESIDENT, THAT ON THE BASIS OF THE ASSAD-DE BORCHGRAVE INTERVIEW HE DID NOT EXPECT TO FIND THE ASSAD MEETING ENLIGHTENING. NONETHELESS, THE FACT THEY WERE NOT RECEIVED LEFT A SOUR TASTE ON THE PART OF ALL OF THEM.

3. IN DISCUSSING KHADDAM, YOU COULD USEFULLY MAKE THE POINT HIS EFFORT TO BE FRANK IS AN EARNEST OF HIS AND THE PRESIDENT'S CONVICTION THAT THIS IS THE BEST BASIS ON WHICH TO BUILD OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS. HE AND ASSAD REITERATED SEVERAL TIMES DURING THEIR MEETINGS THEIR DESIRE FOR ENHANCING BILATERAL RELATIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGED THE ROLE WHICH OUR AID PROGRAM IS BEGINNING, REPEAT BEGINNING, TO PLAY IN STRENGTHENING THOSE TIES.

4. ANOTHER POINT YOU MIGHT FIND USEFUL IS THAT SYRIA WOULD BE LESS EMBARRASSED TO LOSE OUR FOREIGN ASSISTANCE THAN SADAT MIGHT BE IN HAVING IT PUBLICIZED AS A TRANSFER TO REWARD HIM FOR HIS COOPERATION WITH THE US. FURTHERMORE, OUR TRANSFER OF THE FUNDS WOULD IRRITATE THE SYRIANS BUT THE SIZE OF OUR PROGRAMS DOES NOT GIVE US THE LEVERAGE TO INFLUENCE THE DIRECTION OF THEIR POLICY ON WHAT THEY PERCEIVE AS SO FUNDAMENTAL A MATTER TO THEIR NATIONAL SECURITY.

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TM CODEL WILLIAMS/STEVENS

A) RIBICOFF: THE LAST THING SENATOR RIBICOFF SAID TO ME BEFORE TAKING OFF WAS TO URGE THAT I CALL ON HIM WHEN NEXT IN WASHINGTON TO FOLLOW UP OUR DISCUSSIONS ABOUT SYRIA. I PROMISED TO DO SO AND WILL BE SENDING HIM A PERSONAL LETTER IN THE INTERIM. OF THAT CODEL, HE IS THE ONE I WOULD SINGLE OUT AS MOST VALUABLE FOR EITHER YOU OR NICK TO CONTACT CONCERNING AID PROGRAMS HERE AND INDICATE OUR HOPE THAT THEY WILL BE CONTINUED AS PROOF OF OUR DESIRE TO STRENGTHEN BILATERAL RELATIONS AND EVENTUALLY TO REINTEGRATE SYRIA IN PEACE PROCESS. RIBICOFF WAS PERSONALLY UNHAPPY AT NOT BEING RECEIVED BY ASSAD AND SHARED THE CODEL'S GENERAL SENSE OF DEPRESSION AT THE HARD LINE EXPRESSED BY KHADDAM AND OTHER SYRIAN CONTACTS. NONETHELESS, WE FELT THAT RIBICOFF WAS KEENLY AWARE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF SYRIA TO THE PEACE PROCESS AND WOULD NOT LIGHTLY CAST HIS VOTE AGAINST CONTINUED ASSISTANCE TO THIS COUNTRY.

B) HOLLINGS: HOLLINGS WAS MUCH IMPRESSED BY HIS CONVERSATION HERE WITH EUPHRATES MINISTER SOUBHI KAHALEH AND

OUTSPOKENLY IN FAVOR OF OUR PARTICIPATING IN EUPHRATES
EQUIPMENT MAINTENANCE PROJECT.

C) STEVENS: SENATOR STEVENS STRUCK US AS CRITICAL OF
FOREIGN AID IN GENERAL AND MATTERS SYRIAN IN PAR-
TICULAR. SENATORS WILLIAMS AND CANNON GAVE NO HINT OF
THEIR REACTIONS TO OUR AID PROGRAM. STAFF MEMBERS
ACCOMPANYING CODEL WILLIAMS/STEVENS SIMILARLY DID NOT
INDICATE ANY POSITION ON AID TO SYRIA BUT BOTH RIBICOFF'S
ASSISTANT (HOUSE) AND SFRC STAFFER KEANEY WERE CURIOUS
AND ALERT TO EVERY SUBJECT DISCUSSED DURING THE VISIT.
I FELT THEY WERE NOT UNSYMPATHETIC.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 DAMASCUS 0359

STADIS////////////////////////////////////

FOR NEA/ARN DRAPER FROM AMBASSADOR

6. CODEL ZABLOCKI

A) WE FELT CHAIRMAN ZABLOCKI WAS PLEASED WITH WHAT HE
HEARD OF THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP AND SYMPATHETIC TO
CONTINUING ASSISTANCE TO SYRIA.

B) CAVANAUGH: CAVANAUGH WAS OUTSPOKENLY PLEASED WITH
KHADDAM'S FRANKNESS, SAW THEIR SESSION AS A VALUABLE
EXCHANGE OF VIEWS. HE MADE A POINT OF SAYING SYRIA'S
CURRENT ATTITUDE TOWARD THE PEACE PROCESS WOULD NOT AFFECT
HIS VOTE ON AID.

C) MEYNER: ON HER SECOND VISIT TO SYRIA SHE CAME
ACROSS AS FAVORABLE TO OUR PROGRAMS AND THEIR CONTINUANCE.

D) BINGHAM: BINGHAM REQUESTED AND RECEIVED A ONE-ON-ONE
BRIEFING FROM AID DIRECTOR ON DETAILS OF PROGRAM.

E) BRADY: UNFORTUNATELY, BRADY LEFT WITH AN EXTREMELY NEGATIVE IMPRESSION DUE PRINCIPALLY, I BELIEVE, TO KHADDAM'S HARANGUE. I CANNOT SAY THAT THIS WILL BE TRANSLATED INTO OPPOSITION TO ASSISTANCE TO SYRIA BUT THAT COULD WELL BE THE CASE.

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F) BIERMAN: THE MINORITY STAFF MEMBER EXPRESSED HIMSELF FAVORABLY ABOUT CONTINUING PROGRAMS ALONG THEIR PRESENT LINES.

7. THE FOREGOING REPRESENTS THE RANGE OF INDIVIDUAL REACTIONS WE HEARD FROM BY MEMBERS OF THE CODELS. I KNOW YOU NEED NO COACHING ON DISCUSSING ON THE HILL THE IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING CHANOEWJ(OMISSION CORRECTION TO FOLLOW) #

TO SYRIA YOU CAN SAY ON MY

BEHALF THAT I AM CONVINCED THAT OUR PROGRAMS BOTH IN PARTICIPANT TRAINING AND CAPITAL PROJECTS HAVE PROVIDED US WITH A REMARKABLE INSTRUMENT TO OPEN DOORS THROUGHOUT THE SYRIAN BUREAUCRACY WHICH HAVE BEEN CLOSED TO US FOR WELL OVER A DECADE. TRANSFORMATION OF SYRIAN ATTITUDES IS GOING TO BE A LONG PROCESS AND WE CANNOT EXPECT TO BE ABLE TO POINT TO DRAMATIC SHIFTS IN SYRIAN POLICY BES

(OMISSION CORRECTIONS TO FOLLOW) #

S PLAYING AN INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT ROLE IN THAT. THE ENCOURAGING FACT IS THAT THERE CLEARLY ARE INSTRUCTIONS OUT FROM THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THIS GOVERNMENT TO RECEIVE VISITING AMERICANS AND ATTEMPT PERSUADE THEM OF THE WISDOM OF SYRIAN POLICY. I HAVE REPORTED THE COMMENT OF PEOPLE'S COUNCIL PRESIDENT AL-HALABI THAT SYRIA RESENTED BEING LUMPED

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BY DR. BRZEZINSKI WITH THE SOVIETS. WE WILL BE SUBMITTING SHORTLY A WRAP-UP ON THE VISIT HERE OF THE CU-SPONSORED GROUP OF AMERICAN YOUNG POLITICAL LEADERS.

THEY WERE GIVEN ACCESS TO WHAT IS FOR US A WHOLE NEW GROUP
OF SYRIAN PERSONALITIES IN THE BAATH PARTY COMMAND
STRUCTURE. WE HOPE TO BUILD ON THEIR CONTACTS IN THE
MONTHS AHEAD. THE SYRIANS IN THE HARD CORE OF THE PARTY
ARE INTRIGUED BY THEIR NEW CONTACTS WITH AMERICANS AND
I SUBMIT IT IS IN OUR INTEREST TO CONTINUE TO EXTEND
OUR NETWORK OF CONTACTS BUILDING UPON THOSE FEW WE HAVE
BEEN PERMITTED TO CULTIVATE SINCE RESUMPTION OF RELATIONS.
THIS IS NOT THE TIME FOR US TO APPEAR VINDICTIVE TOWARDS
SYRIA, HOWEVER IRRITATING THEY ARE IN PRESENTATION OF
THEIR CONVICTIONS THAT SADAT HAS GONE WRONG. WE SHOULD
KEEP OUR EYES FIXED ON THE REALITY THAT SYRIA REMAINS
INTERESTED IN A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT AND IN REINFORCING
WHAT ARE STILL LIMITED AREAS OF COOPERATION BETWEEN
WASHINGTON AND DAMASCUS.
MURPHY

NOTE BY OC/T: SECTION 2 OF 2 DAMASCUS 0359; #OMISSION.
CORRECTIONS TO FOLLOW.

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